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A DAY FOR REMEMBRANCE AND RECOMMITMENT - MEMORIAL DAY 2002

BY CONGRESSMAN BOB FILNER AND CONGRESSMAN LANE EVANS

On May 27th, all across America, in towns large and small, Memorial Day will be observed. On Memorial Day, we pay tribute to our war dead. Honoring our war dead began before the Civil War ended. It began as a spontaneous tribute to those who had served and sacrificed. Over the years, this tribute became widespread as it was adopted in communities throughout the nation. Since 1971, Memorial Day has been observed as a national holiday on the last Monday in the month of May.

Of all our national holidays, we Americans recognize Memorial Day as our most solemn. Unlike July 4th when we celebrate our Independence, or Veterans' Day when we honor those who have answered the call to arms, Memorial Day stands alone as a tribute to those who have lost their lives in defense of our Constitution, our Country, and our way of life. We set aside one lone day to officially memorialize our fallen, but we must never confine our remembrance of them to this one day alone. Though today is a day for quiet reflection, memory, and mourning, we also celebrate the selfless spirit of those who have given us so much.

President Woodrow Wilson once said, "I would rather belong to a poor nation that was free, than to a rich nation that had ceased to be in love with liberty!" We have maintained the principle of liberty through-out our 226-year history and we, like President Wilson, would not want to belong to a nation that had "ceased to be in love with liberty." There are those in this world, however, who do not love liberty.

As a result, America has been witness to many wars. Some long, some short. From the ringing of

the first shots of our War for Independence at Lexington Green, through two world wars, the Korean conflict, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf, Americans have come forward when their country called. They have done so not only to protect our shores, but also to protect others who have asked for our help. We have never been a nation that turns its back on those in need. Today we find ourselves once again at war. On September 11, 2001, we suffered losses on our shores at the hands of an enemy that sought to catch us unaware. Today we are at war against the cowardice of terrorism.

In the days after September 11th, Americans stood up and answered the call of duty. They lined up at the recruiting offices across the nation and once again the words "I want to serve" were spoken. They offered up the same dedication, conviction, and de-termination as those in times past.

They may have never thought of serving in the military before, but they quit their jobs and said goodbye to their families because America needed them. They joined the ranks of those who have gone before them and today are setting the standard for those who will follow. General George Patton said, "The secret of victory lies not wholly in knowledge. It lurks invisible in that vitalizing spark, intangible, yet evident as lightning - the warrior soul." There is no shortage of the warrior soul in the American people.

Sadly, some of our soldiers, sailors, and airmen will lose their lives to the ugly specter of war. Just as it was difficult for past generations to send their sons and daughters off to war, it is difficult for us to do the same now. We comfort ourselves with the

knowledge that these valiant servicemembers have borne the heaviest of burdens and made the ultimate sacrifice.

We do not find war easy or commonplace. We are a peace-loving nation. But we will not let those who seek to limit our liberty prevail.

The events of September 11th are more than eight months behind us, but they are still burned in our memory. We struggle to understand and make sense of this tragic event. All around us, we see signs, bumper stickers, and billboards proclaiming, "Never forget." And we will never forget.

We will also never forget those who have fought and died for this country in wars past. From Arlington National Cemetery to the Normandy-American World War II Memorial Cemetery in France, our citizen-soldiers lie in eternal peace.

Though they are now at peace, we must not rest. We must not forget those who have gone before and given their lives, selflessly to their country. We owe everything that we are today to them.

Some were young, some were old. Fathers, Mothers, Sons, Daughters, Cousins, Aunts and

Uncles have given their lives in order for us to be able to sleep well in peace, secure in the knowledge that they are there to protect us. We owe to them, not just on this day, but every day, our eternal gratitude.

Today, as we reflect on the lives of America's fallen heroes, we offer the words of the poet Lawrence Binyon, who said:

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."

Congressman Bob Filner, a member of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, represents California's 50th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives. Congressman Lane Evans represents Illinois 17th Congressional District and is the Ranking Democrat on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.